OPENING STATEMENT OF REP. CHRIS CARNEY AS PREPARED

SUBCOMMITTEE ON MANAGEMENT INVESTIGATIONS & OVERSIGHT
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

"SBInet: Does it Pass the Border Security Test? Part II"

Thursday, June 17, 2010

Today we are here to receive testimony on the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) efforts to secure the nation's borders through the Secure Border Initiative (SBI) technology component known as SBI*net.* According to the GAO report released today entitled "*Security Border Initiative: DHS Needs to Reconsider its Proposed Investment in Key Technology Program,"* poorly defined requirements and limitations in the capabilities of commercially available system components have led the department to downgrade its expectations for SBInet. The result will be a deployed and operational system that, like Project 28, may not live up to expectations and provide less mission support than was originally envisioned.

As Boeing developed the system, it became clear it would not meet the requirements established by the Department. As opposed to ensuring that the requirements were satisfied, the number of component-level requirements was reduced from 1,286 to 880, or by about 32 percent.

Some examples of requirements that received waivers or deviations include:
Unattended ground sensors that could not differentiate between human, vehicle, and animal targets. Since they were only able to identify potential vehicles – not humans and animals – this requirement was changed.

The daytime cameras to identify humans were judged to be operationally ineffective over 5 kilometers, while the requirement indicated that the cameras should be effective to 10 kilometers.

The laser range finder was determined to have an effective range of less than 2 kilometers, while the requirement for the effective range was 10 kilometers.

The geographic locations that will deploy SBI*net* capabilities have also been reduced. As of September 2008, the initial Block 1 deployment was to span three Border Patrol sectors: Tucson, Yuma, and El Paso— for a total of 655 miles. Deployment to these three areas was the priority of the Border Patrol, due to the high threat levels. At present, the only areas expected to be covered by SBInet technology on the Southwest border are Tucson 1 and Ajo 1. Together, these two deployments cover a mere 53 miles of the 1,989-mile southern border.

The Department has not yet estimated a reliable life cycle cost of deploying Block 1, in violation of OMB regulations. The cost estimate should include all government and contractor costs over the program's full life cycle, from program inception, through design, development, deployment, operation and maintenance all the way to retirement. According to the GAO, the cost estimate calculated by the Department does not include all relevant costs, such as support contractor costs, costs associated with system and software design, development, and all testing activities. Furthermore, the cost estimate has not been updated to reflect program changes that have occurred since its development.

In response to GAO's findings, Department officials indicated that the DHS Cost Analysis Division was unable to prepare an accurate cost estimate due to a shortage in the personal and tools needed to do so. It was also indicated that, as of July 2009, there were only eight cost estimators (6 in headquarters and 2 in program offices) for the entire Department of Homeland Security.

SBI*net* has been plagued with a number of technology and systems integration issues, as highlighted by GAO. Over $1.1billion has been spent on the Secure Border Initiative, and over $800 million has been spent on SBI*net* alone. 53 miles at a cost of $1.1 billion is unacceptable. At our last hearing on SBInet in March, I asked if we could get a refund and I believe the tax payers would still like one. I believe some good has come from this program, but not nearly enough to justify the funding and time that has been spent on this program. I urge the Department to continue to explore alternate means to secure the border in a timely and effective manner.